

Hi, I'm Candice McQueen and today I want to share some thoughts on why tests matter and why students take TNReady in Tennessee.

In every Tennessee classroom, teaching and learning looks different based on the textbooks, curriculum, and lessons that the school and teacher have chosen. But how do teachers, parents, and schools know if their students are learning and understanding what is being taught? No parent wants to find out after their child graduates from high school that despite earning good grades, they are not fully prepared for college or a good-paying job.

That's why we have assessments. They provide one form of feedback about students' academic progress and how it aligns with what they are supposed to learn in each grade.

There are different types of tests. Some tests that we call formative assessments allow a teacher to see how much students have learned over a relatively short period of time. This may involve taking a chapter test, using a screening exam, writing an essay, pop quizzes, or a project presentation. All of these moments provide teachers with feedback so they can see how students are progressing. This helps them tailor day-to-day instruction, determine if some students are falling behind or if others are ready to move forward, and gives them a sense of what teaching practices are effective.

We also need to take a big-picture view of what a student has mastered, and that's where summative assessments like TNReady come in.

A child's education is so important that we want to give students and families multiple perspectives. We want all families to feel confident in the education their child is receiving, not simply because they trust their child's teacher, but because they can see that their student is ready for the next step in their education journey. State tests like TNReady provide an outside check on whether a student is truly mastering the content they are expected to learn for each grade level and developing the creativity, critical thinking and problem solving skills that will help them be successful. TNReady is always just one feedback loop, and teachers and families should also look to other measures, like students' grades, performance on class

projects and exams, and overall development when they consider their progress or make any decision about a child's education.

TNReady is also helpful for state and district leaders because it provides a consistent benchmark across the state. Otherwise, students in one part of Tennessee may receive a very different education than students in another, or students in one school may be off track compared to students across the county line, and we would have no way to know. We wouldn't find out until our businesses and colleges told us that students in one region or pocket of the state are not qualified, or until a student applied for a job or applied to go to college and was not accepted. TNReady data helps us to make sure all students have a fair shot, and the results help us make decisions about where we need to provide additional support.

We also use TNReady to identify districts that are excelling, so we can learn what is working. Schools and districts can see if there are places where students are falling behind their peers or certain groups of students are performing differently. And teachers can use TNReady to see how their class mastered the content and whether there are areas where they need to take a different approach in the year ahead.

Data from TNReady should never be used in isolation, but it is one key piece of a bigger picture that shows how our schools are meeting our educational goals.

At the end of the day, we want all our students to develop real-world skills, including critical thinking, writing, and problem solving, and we want parents to be confident that their child is ready to pursue their dreams because of the quality education they receive in their public school.

Each of our children deserves to be ready for the next step in their educational journey, and using assessments is one way we make sure they are prepared for the opportunities that lie ahead.